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ABSTRACT

The low number of high school students electing to take advantage of the training available at a vocational school was addressed by implementing a program of activities intended to increase knowledge and develop critical thinking skills in decision making. The program took place in a West Florida high school with 1,819 students in grades 9-12, the majority of whom were from a lower socioeconomic background; 517 were sophomores. When the program began, only 17 students were taking courses at the vocational school. Ninety percent of the students responding to a survey at the school said they had "no" to "low" knowledge of the vocational school. The program tried to increase the number of sophomores signing up for the vocational school, improve their attitudes toward the vocational school by critical thinking activities, and improve their knowledge of the vocational school by educational activities. At the end of 12 weeks, the number of sophomores registering for the vocational school was 21, compared to 5 for the preceding year. The goal of 50 students was not met, but attitudes toward the vocational school were more positive, with a reduction of 67 percent in the number of negative comments on a survey. It was recommended that the vocational school change its name to a technical institute or technical college. (A list of 16 references is provided. Appendixes include a student survey, survey results, brainstorming sections, student plan, and career choices listed by students.) (KC)

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DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROGRAM TO INCREASE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

EUNICE WILLIAMS

A Practicum Report

submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the Advancement of Education of Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Educational Specialist.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a National Database System for reference.

April, 1991

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ABSTRACT

Development and Implementation of a Program to Increase Vocational School Attendance Among High School Students
Williams, Eunice W., 1991: Practicum Report, Nova University, The Center for the Advancement of Education.
Descriptors: Secondary Education/Vocational School/Critical Thinking/Vocational Publicity/

The low number of high school students electing to take advantage of the training available at vocational school was addressed by implementation of a program of activities intended to increase knowledge, and develop critical thinking skills in decision making. The results show a four percent increase in the number of students registering for vocational school.

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my work, will earn similar respect.

Signed _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Title Page.....i

Abstract.....ii

Authorship Statement.....iii

Observer's Verification.....iv

Table of Contents.....v

Chapters

I. Purpose.....1

II. Research and Solutions.....6

III. Method.....13

IV. Results.....18

V. Recommendations.....20

Reference.....22

Appendix A: Survey Form A.....24

Appendix B: Survey Results.....25

Appendix C: Brainstorming.....29

Appendix D: Student Plan.....31

Appendix E: Survey B Results.....32

CHAPTER I

PURPOSE

This program took place in a West Coast Florida High School with an enrollment of 1819 students in grades nine to twelve. Employed at the school were four administrators, four guidance counselors and 105 teachers. The majority of the students came from a lower socio-economic background. Approximately ten percent of the students came from upper middle class families.

The selected group of Sophomores included 517 students. Of this group 131 were Black, 58 were Hispanic and 343 were White. Over half the students were from single parent homes.

A full academic curriculum is offered by the school. Beginning in the eleventh grade, students can elect to take courses at the nearby vocational school. Transportation is provided to and from these courses during the day. A total of 17 students out of a population of 1819 were taking these courses.

The writer has been employed as a science teacher at the high school since 1974. During that time period, this individual has worked with students and teachers in both a teaching and leadership role.

The United States Occupational Outlook Handbook, 1990-91, states the highest number of yearly openings in jobs in this state will include positions for secretaries, general office clerks, nurses, groundskeepers, food preparations workers and carpenters. All of these programs are currently at the local vocational school. Tuition is free while the student is still in high school.

Students can take three hours a day at the vocational school while they are in the eleventh grade, and six hours as seniors. This fall only 17 students were taking advantage of this opportunity.

There is a discrepancy between the number of students currently attending vocational school and the number that should be attending. Students need to learn to carefully analyze their ability, talents, interests, and resources, and use this information to predict a wise future choice for themselves.

The problem of low enrollment may be caused by student attitude. Some students attach a stigma to the vocational school. A survey (Appendix A:23) was developed and given to the sophomore class. Twenty nine

percent expressed negative attitudes about the vocational school. One student's comment from the survey labeled the vocational school, "a place for people who don't care". Another student identified the vocational school as, "a place where pregnant girls go". The cause of these negative opinions could be the lack of exposure to positive ideas requarding the vocational school. These negative opinions could be causing some students to avoid involving themselves in programs at the vocational school.

The county program for teenage mothers, the adult high school and the alternative high school are all located on the same block as the vocational school. Some of these special programs are better known than the vocational program. The results of the survey show only 29 percent of the sophomores in the high school have a negative opinion of this location.

Ninety percent of the students responding to the survey labeled their knowledge of the vocational school as none to low. Many students requested information about the school on the comments section. (Appendix B:25) The cause of this lack of knowledge could be due to teachers

who attended college immediately following high school and are not familiar with the programs and opportunities of the vocational school. This lack of knowledge about the programs available also appeared to be partially causing the low enrollment.

According to the high school head guidance counselor, Gary Holbrook (1990), a county committee developed a program to increase vocational school attendance in 1986. This program included field trips for the high school students to the vocational center, more one on one guidance and additional publicity. This program was not implemented.

This practicum attempted to address the problem of low vocational school attendance. The low knowledge level of the students needed to be changed. Negative opinions regarding programs could be replaced with positive information about the benefits of the classes. The sophomore class was selected as the target group for this practicum.

The outcome objectives over the twelve weeks of the program concentrated on the following three issues:

1. The number of sophomore students signing up for vocational school for the 1990-91 year would increase to 50.
2. Through the use of critical thinking activities, the tenth grade students would improve by 50 percent their attitude toward vocational school as measured by the number of negative comments on the survey (Appendix A:23).
3. The tenth grade students' knowledge level about vocational school would improve. There would be 50 students who rate their level of knowledge as high on the survey given in the twelfth week.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH AND SOLUTION STRATEGY

The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship released in January of 1988 an interim report titled "The Forgotten Half Non-College-Bound Youth In America." In this report the circumstances surrounding todays' non-college bound youth are described.

The American economy is changing from a manufacturing to a service, retail and technological job market. More education and skills are required of todays' young family to be able to survive in the current employment market. The present economy is making financial success more difficult for young people to obtain.

Connections for non-college bound youth to the job market need to be formed. One valuable connection is vocational school. The hands on approach offered in the vocational school gives students an effective way to acquire basic skills and general abilities they will need to be successful in a broad range of areas. Efforts to improve vocational school attendance have been going on

locally and nationally for many years. Most efforts involve increasing the public awareness of vocational education. (Grant,1989)

The American Vocational Association, Inc. has published a handbook dealing with public relations. Included are use of the visual, verbal and audiovisual media. Methods of using advertising and press releases are explained. (Lewis, Mulchany and Wedge,1978)

Radio, television and newspaper advertisements are suggested as a means to build vocational school attendance in a teacher education module published by the State of Florida. Further suggestions include pamphlets, billboards, posters, leaflets, speakers and vocational students themselves. (State of Florida,1973)

From 1987 to 1988, the vocational school enrollment of Council Bluffs, Iowa was increased 37 percent. Elkin and Tucker describe how the Council Bluffs Community School District accomplished this. A career ladder program was designed and implemented to serve all students in grades nine through twelve. Short term exploration of a number of careers took place in this program. Also involved in this program, was student part

day placement in local businesses while taking related courses in high school.

"Turf" considerations of the local community college and the vocational school were set aside to concentrate on the best ways to serve the students. Some of the background work for this program took place over many years (Elkin and Tucker,1988).

In Philadelphia beginning in 1969, the high schools were restructured to include seven academies. These academies featured business, horticulture, health, mental technology, physical education, environmental technology, applied electrical science and automotive and mechanical science. This program has been a successful transition from school to work for many of the students (O'Neil 1990).

The Sweetwater Union High School District in Chula Vista, California created an incentive plan for principals. The principal was allowed to keep the state per-pupil allotment for each dropout enrolling in one of the states' youth centers. Dropouts have decreased from 2,200 to 600 and many graduates are entering the local work force (O'Neil, 1990).

Nancy Livesay, Resident Principal for the State of Florida, listed many proven methods and philosophies for successful vocational programs. The counselor or occupational specialist needs to be a strong advocate of the vocational program. The vocational school cannot become a place for dumping students with no other place to go. The vocational school can avoid this by developing their own conduct specifications for their clients. Students planning on attending vocational school need to be advised to take at least Algebra 1 and course work in technology. A drug free program is important. The quality of the offerings at the vocational school are a large factor to students. And finally successful programs have strong articulation programs started by the principal of the vocational school. (Livesay, 1990)

Deede Sharpe, manager of educational program development for the Walt Disney World Company in Orlando, presented suggestions on how to market vocational education. Included are some interesting statistics on how often media messages should be sent to the public to be effective. According to Sharpe, the message sent only once gets no notice. Messages need to be repeated through brochures, contests, or other forms of presentation. The

most effective pattern involves repetition three to ten times per month. After 12 times a month the message repetition has a negative effect.

Sharpe also states that students from the vocational school are often the best advertisement. As a means of assessing the value of the marketing program, surveys and enrollment figures are appropriate.

Psychographics, the images people hold of themselves, determine where they will go and what they will do in the future. To ascertain these self images questionnaires or personal interviews can be used. Once an audience's needs and its perception of the product are found, a program can be designed to appeal to these special interests (Sharpe, 1986).

In an interview, Keith Matthews, the assistant director of the local vocational school, explained his efforts at building attendance over several years. He expressed difficulty in combatting the proximity of programs designed for high school dropouts and pregnant mothers to be. He felt separation of these programs from the vocational school campus would improve the image of his school. A per-pupil financial incentive for the principals of the feeder schools was also mentioned as a

possible motivational device to increase attendance in the vocational school (Matthews,1990)

In a phone interview, Kimberly Scalzitti of the local chamber of commerce described visiting an exemplary program in the Orlando area. The school in Orlando is named Mid-Florida Technical School. Bob Clark runs a program which is tough on discipline, drug free, and respected. Mr. Clark thinks a strong marketing program is the key to his success. Factors to be considered here might be a name change for the local school to help with the image problem. (Scalzitti, 1990)

Also recommended, by Kim Scalzitti, was a video tape The Tour, produced by the Sarasota County Vocational Center (1989). This tape includes high interest computer graphics and rock music as it presents the vocational school. The tape attempts to reverse the negative image of the vocational school and to show former students in successful situations.

Dimino (1989) saw high improvement in students' thinking skills, when they worked with open-ended questions which were designed to increase their analytical skills. Students who construct thinking on concepts which make sense to themselves, building ideas

on their own experiences become better able to work with new problems. Role playing, socratic questioning, reconstructing opposing views, analyzing experiences, mental organization plans, listening critically and exploring implications and consequences are all ideas presented to help increase critical thinking. (Paul,1989)

The video tape, Olympics of the Mind, (1982) shows the advantages of involving students in creative brainstorming. Many new ideas are generated, students work on problems as groups, and a higher level of thinking results.

The change, desired in this practicum, could be achieved within the local high school. Using the methods of Sharpe, mentioned above, the message was given between three and ten times a month and not repeated over twelve times. A survey was given to determine psychographics.

Pamphlets and posters were used as suggested in the Recruiting Adult Education Students module. Students were exposed to visual media, by means of the video tape promoting vocational school. This was to help change the image of the school and capture their interest. After gaining interest, information was easier to communicate.

In this practicum, an attempt was made to increase the students' ability to think critically through brainstorming sessions. Open-ended questions as used by Dimino, were employed to improve thinking skill. Practice in critical thinking on career planning was used to increase the level of thinking.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This program was implemented in tenth grade Students with Teachers as Advisors groups (STAR). These groups meet for thirty minutes each week with the teacher acting in a counselor's role for the students. During week one of the program, a survey, (Appendix A:23) was given to the tenth grade students during their STAR time period. Letters of explanation, for the teachers, accompanied the surveys. Also during week one the author met with the person supervising the STAR program to coordinate the dispersal of the survey.

The second week a meeting of the tenth grade STAR teachers was arranged. At this meeting the purpose of the program was explained. A schedule of events was distributed and questions were answered. STAR teachers were asked to tell their students of the program and its purpose.

During week three a video tape about the advantages of vocational school was shown. A set of fact sheets, with information about the courses at the local vocational school, was given to each student. The

advisors were requested to show the video tape first, and afterwards hand out the fact sheet to each student. Permission to use the video tape was obtained from a nearby county.

In week four, a comparison of various careers and salaries were given to the STAR teachers for distribution and discussion with their students. The students were asked to look over the material. They were also advised that in the next STAR class they will be asked to make career plans for hypothetical students.

During week five the STAR teachers were given directions and materials (Appendix C:28) for an activity where groups of students worked to brainstorm future plans for imaginary students. Descriptions of these students and their current situations were given to the groups. The student group leader presented what the group thought was the best plan for the imaginary individual. The intention was for the STAR advisor to be a facilitator in this activity.

Also, during week five the progress of the program was assessed and adjustments were made as needed. This was done on an informal basis, by the writer talking to the various involved STAR teachers.

For week six the teachers were requested to hold discussions with their groups of students, asking the students, to think of various improvements to help more student eventually get better jobs. This was accomplished by using a brainstorming and then a clustering technique. These suggestions were collected.

Week seven found guest speakers in STAR groups. These were former students who had completed programs at the vocational school and now are employed.

During week eight guest speakers from the local chamber of commerce gave STAR groups information on locally available jobs and where to get the skills for these jobs. The STAR teachers also were given posters to display in their classrooms publicizing the vocational school.

In the ninth week puzzle materials centering on the various course offerings at the vocational school were distributed to the STAR teachers. Additional posters were put up on school bulletin boards.

During week ten, STAR teachers were asked to prepare their students to write a simplified plan for their future. This week students were asked to discuss in groups their own interests, ability, skills, academic

background, and methods of financial support. A paragraph was then written by each student related to these items. The paragraphs were kept by the STAR teacher, to be used in writing the plan the following week.

The eleventh week, the STAR teachers were asked to distribute the paragraphs and plan forms (Appendix D:30). The students were asked to fill out the plan forms and turn these in to the STAR teacher.

The twelfth week the survey was administered again. The results were tabulated and compared to the first week.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

At the end of the registration period for the year, the number of sophomores registering for vocational school was compared to the number for the previous year. In 1990 five sophomores registered for vocational school. In 1991 21 sophomores registered. The objective of 50 was not met. This data was taken in April and some registration continues up through early June.

Additionally, at the end of twelve weeks, student answers on the survey from week one were compared with the results from week twelve. The number of negative comments were compared (Appendix E:32), to demonstrate a possible reduction. After the implementation of the program there was a reduction of 67 percent in the number of negative comments. This exceeded the objective by 17 percent.

Finally, after twelve weeks, student responses on the survey dealing with their perceived levels of knowledge, of the vocational school, were compared. On the first survey eight students rated their knowledge as high (Appendix B:26). On the second survey 31 students

considered their knowledge of the vocational school as high (Appendix E:32). The objective of 50 was not met.

The local vocational school has increased the number of visits by its counselors to the high school. This occurred as a response to the larger number of students requesting counseling regarding the vocational school.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS

The writer, has made this program available for use by other high schools. On a more local basis, the program results were shared with the guidance and career specialists. STAR advisors have been encouraged to continue to present the program each year in the high school. The video tapes used are available in the media center.

The writer has given copies of the results of the survey to the local chamber of commerce and permission was given to use the survey in other local high schools. These were requested by the chamber. Using this data the chamber has developed a survey to be given in the local high schools, This group is interested in having an adequately trained work force available. This would attract more light manufacturing and therefore a broader financial and tax base to this area.

The results of this program were shared with Keith Matthews,the assistant director of the vocational school. He expressed the opinion a broad base philosophical change is needed, to create a change in the system by

which students are guided into more appropriate education and training. If the work force does not all require college training, why are so many being pushed only in this direction? He suggested changing the name of the vocational school including the terms technical institute, or technical college. (Matthews,1991)

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT SURVEY

1. What type of career do you presently think you will pursue?

2. If training for this career was available at the vocational school. Would you attend?

3. In your opinion, what is your level of knowledge about the vocational school.

4. Do you have additional comments related to the vocational school?

Comments:

APPENDIX B

SURVEY RESULTS

CAREERS LISTED BY RESPONDENTS

LAW 16

ENGINEER 16

MEDICINE 13

EDUCATION 9

CLERICAL 2

COMPUTER 10

CONSTRUCTION 6

MECHANIC 3

BUSINESS 15

PSYCHOLOGY 3

ARCHITECT 10

CRIMINOLOGY 5

COMMUNICATION 1

NONE 3

MUSIC 6

COSMETOLOGY 4

MILITARY 3

ARTIST 2

FLIGHT ATTENDANT 1

SOCIAL WORK 1

SPORTS 18

DENTAL ASSISTANT 1

POLITICS 1

FASHION DESIGN 1

PHOTOGRAPHY 2

NANNY 1

PARAMEDIC 2

DECORATING 1

NURSING 6

UNDECIDED 13

Would you attend the vocational school if education for your area was available?

105 yes - 65 percent

16 maybe - 10 percent

41 no - 25 percent

Respondents' rating of their own level of knowledge about the vocational school.

none to low 147 - 90 percent

medium 8 - 5 percent

high 8 - 5 percent

Comments:

-"Training is available and I don't want to go."-

-"I would go I am going to college."-

-"I don't know any thing about it."-

-"I've been there and didn't like it."-

-"Dropouts go there."

-"I think it's a good idea."-

-"I don't like them."-

-"The smoking policy is great."-

-"They train you for a career."-

-"They should have regular to honors classes there."-

-"It is a good place for learning a trade."-

-"It can be a good place for future education."-

-"It is for kids trying to breeze by school. Its also easy credit which is stupid. Voc. school is a waste of time, most kids go there because they are too stupid. You might get credits but its stupid."-

-"I like the fact that you don't have to pay if you go during your senior year. You can also get a job quicker than if you went to college."-

-"For people who don't care."-

-"I like their smoking policy."-

-"I like it because it gives those who didn't go to school because they quit or got pregnant a place where they can go and learn."-

-"I would like to know more."-

-"want to go to college"-

-"give us folders on it"-

-"rather go to college"-

-"Do they have aviation classes?"-

-"could have an assembly or folders on it"-

-"Good for lots of people - I would attend if I have to"-

-"I plan to go to college."-

-"Do you stay there all day?"-

-"Do you get the credits you need to graduate?"-

-"Do you go there all year?"-

-"As long as you can get an education, it doesn't matter what school you go to."-

-"A place pregnant girls go"-

Totals on Comments

9 negative

9 positive

13 neutral

APPENDIX C

BRAINSTORMING

DIRECTIONS: IN A GROUP OF 4, MAKE A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STUDENTS.
APPOINT A RECORDER TO KEEP A RECORD OF ALL OF THE IDEAS FROM PEOPLE IN THE GROUP.
RECORD ALL IDEAS (WILD AS THEY MAY BE).
NO ONE'S IDEAS SHOULD BE "PUT DOWN".
AFTER 10 MINUTES OF BRAINSTORMING PUT TOGETHER THE FINAL PLAN. SELECT A LEADER TO PRESENT THE GROUP'S PLAN.

MIKE: Mike is a sophomore with a 1.6 grade average. He is having difficulty in high school with English and Science. He enjoys Physical Education and Drafting. Mike has an after school job at the local burger spot. He doesn't especially like this job, but feels his family needs the money.

JENNIFER: Jennifer is a freshman with a 2.1 GPA. She likes people especially children. She takes care of many of the neighborhood kids when their parents are not home.

Jennifer enjoys most of her school subjects. She never has time to do homework. She is too busy taking care of people. Jennifer lives with her mom who works in a glass plant.

CURT: Curt is a sophomore with only 2 credits. He is approaching 16 and seriously considering dropping out. His neighbor has a car which he likes to help repair. Curt lives with his Dad. He hears constantly from his father about the difficulty of supporting a family.

SHERYL: Sheryl is a sophomore with a 3.2 GPA. She is planning on becoming a lawyer because she wants to have a good income. Sheryl does all of her homework and really concentrates in class. Financially, her family is doing alright but she is told they can't pay all of her college tuition.

APPENDIX D

THE PLAN

NAME_____.

MY CURRENT GPA_____.

SUBJECTS I LIKE _____,_____.

I LIKE TO WORK WITH PEOPLE_____YES_____NO.

WILL MY PARENTS PAY FOR ME TO ATTEND COLLEGE?____YES ___NO.

DO I CURRENTLY HAVE A HIGH ENOUGH GPA, OR OTHER OPTIONS, TO POSSIBLY RECEIVE A SCHOLARSHIP? _____YES____NO.

ARE THERE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL OFFERINGS FROM WHICH I COULD BENEFIT?_____YES_____NO.

COULD I GET A LOAN TO PAY FOR FUTURE EDUCATION? _____YES____NO.

COULD I BENEFIT FROM TAKING VOCATIONAL CLASSES DURING HIGH SCHOOL?_____YES_____NO.

WHEN I GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL, WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

_____,_____,_____

FROM THE ABOVE LIST CHECK YOUR BEST CHOICE.

DESCRIBE THE BEST PLAN FOR YOUR FUTURE.

APPENDIX E

SURVEY B RESULTS

CAREERS LISTED BY RESPONDENTS

LAW 12

ENGINEER 10

MEDICINE 8

EDUCATION 11

CLERICAL 5

COMPUTER 10

CONSTRUCTION 3

MECHANIC 3

BUSINESS 7

PSYCHOLOGY 3

ARCHITECT 6

CRIMINOLOGY 3

NONE 1

MUSIC 2

COSMETOLOGY 6

MILITARY 3

SPORTS 6

FASHION DESIGN 1

PHOTOGRAPHY 1

NURSING 7

WILDLIFE OFFICER 1

UNDECIDED 5

Would you attend vocational school if education for your area was available?

66 yes - 59 percent

43 no - 38 percent

2 probably - 2 percent

Respondent's rating of their own level of knowledge about the vocational school.

none to low 22 - 20 percent

medium 58 - 52 percent

high 31 - 28 percent

Comments:

-"They aren't teaching what I want to learn."-

-"Their for people who do not attend regular colleges."-

-"Take students there to see if they like."_

-"Let them get phamplets from the office if they are interested. field trip to the school"-

-"more time in Star"-

-"I know enough, I do not want to go."-

-"I think its good, it helps people."

-"I think its good for some aiming for a technical job, but I need a university."
-"Tell us more about it the end of the junior year."-
-"Talk more about it"
-"make announcements"
-"it helps people who drop out of high school."
-"have school visits"
-"It's for slow people who give up too early."
-"It's good but I want to stay in high school."
-"more information"
-"offer more classes"
-"take us to visit"
-"vocational should have more choice"
-"it's helping people."

5 neutral
2 negative
13 positive